

REWIND: MAIDSTONE MEMORIES

Royal Blue Review

Wealdstone superb in top of table battle

Maidstone 0, Wealdstone 3

MASTERLY Wealdstone moved to the top of the Alliance Premier League for the first time with their most complete performance since Allen Batsford took over as manager two years ago.

The reign as table toppers only lasted 48 hours with Maidstone and Enfield both winning on Easter Monday. Yet the superb 3-0 drubbing of leaders Maidstone, former international Peter Taylor and all, only served to illustrate very clearly that Wealdstone are the team that everyone must fear at the moment as the APFL championship reaches the home straight (Wales Ron Saunders won the home straight Wealdstone outbought).

In the end Wealdstone outplayed a Maidstone outfit who had tasted their defeat at home only twice in 16 matches this season.

Yet things could not have started worse for the visitors. Maidstone began in lively fashion and in the seventh minute a crunching tackle from Thompson on Neil Cordice over on the left flank left the 'Stones midfielder writhing in agony.

Thompson earned a booking for his trou-

bling dressing room with ligament damage that could keep him out for some time.

Fully four minutes after Cordice was carried off, Robin Wainwright, preferred on this occasion to Nigel Johnson, came on as substitute.

Wealdstone had a heart-stopping moment early on when the referee hesitated amid loud appeals for a penalty after Byatt had tackled hard on Ovard.

Protested

But minutes later leading scorer Mark Graves produced a typical piece of cool finishing to seal the win for what proved to be Maidstone's club season.

But the 25th minute goal certainly wasn't without controversy. Alan Cordice lay offside and injured after a clash with Maidstone keeper Richardson. Stuart Pearce latched on to a half clearance and swung the ball over to where Graves had for space. The Wealdstone striker admitted afterwards that he had almost too much time but he teed up a shot which gave the stranded keeper no chance.

Maidstone protested loudly and hard, but the general consensus of opinion was that the referee was right in his decision that the prostrate player was not interfering with play. The goal certainly gave the Wealdstone fans a ringing out loud and clear in a crowd of almost 2,500 — something to cheer about and without doubt it seemed to rock Maidstone back on their heels.

After the early worries, Wealdstone came to life as Graves flashed a drive from fully 30 yards just over the bar and Pearce was inches wide of the post with a similarly fierce effort.

Maidstone tried for the early goal in the second half which could have made such a difference. In the shape of John Barley they had a player who, on another day, might have rescued them but the Wealdstone cover was impenetrable.

And in the 53rd minute Wealdstone played superbly over defence to score the second goal which effectively wrapped up the match. Yet again it was the cool composure of Mark Cordice that was so decisive, as he teed up into space and sent a

great job over Richardson, who had ventured off his line, and into the top corner. Great cover from Pearce, who headed off the line to save a certain goal, and soon outstanding keeping from Roy Goddard, including a remarkable one hand stop at the rear post to deny Ovard, kept Maidstone out before John Marggerrison put the icing on the cake, as he scored 'Stones third with 15 minutes left.

The goal came via industrious Roy Davies's free kick, Marggerrison rising above a by now thoroughly demoralised Maidstone defence to head a well-placed header past Richardson.

After a drink of champagne from the 'Stones Cup' — played for every year between the two clubs — winning manager Allen Batsford said:

"We knew that it was going to be physical and it was a bad tackle that injured Neil. But we kept it very tight and I thought we played very well as a team.

Mark had taken the first goal very well and this second was just superb."

Richardson, Cordice, Pearce, Byatt, Baggott, Wainwright, Goddard, Fobson, Cordier (A), Graves, Corlier (A), Sub: Wainwright (15 minutes).

Saturday April 2 1983, Alliance Premier League: Maidstone Utd 0 Wealdstone 3

THIS was just about the best performance I've ever seen from a Wealdstone side. We've maybe had more passionate, tougher, more uncompromising teams but we've never had a better team (though I never saw the great amateur sides) than this XI that stepped out at Maidstone's big old London Road ground this Easter Saturday for a game that would go a

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long way towards shaping the destiny of the Alliance Premier League title.

Or so we thought. As it turned out, we faltered

after this glorious afternoon (three draws and beaten at home, crucially, by Eddie McCluskey's Enfield) and Maidstone and Enfield passed us on the final straight to set up a two-way fight for the championship. The Es finally won it by a point on the last day of the season.

But it might have been us. Oh, how it might have been us.

On this day, Maidstone simply couldn't live with the wit, creativity and impenetrability of the side in blue shirts. London Road had the longest goal stanchions you've ever seen. It took an age to retrieve the ball from the back of the net and, happily, that was what home keeper Richardson was forced to do three times as the Middlesex Stones fans (and there were about 400 in the ground) celebrated wildly on a fabulous spring afternoon.

Marggerrison, the former Fulham star who had added guile to our already-good midfield a few months before,

drove in the opener and the predatory Mark Graves (above) put us well on top. But I best remember Gravesy's second-half goal, when he picked up the ball after some sharp inter-passing 30 yards out, moved it forwards five yards and then struck a beautiful shot over Richardson and deep into the net.

Maidstone were shattered, a beaten side. But they had a nasty streak and a late tackle on the outstanding Neil Cordice had a profound effect on our season. It almost broke his leg, and without our influential midfielder and a thin squad we lost momentum in the title run-in, eventually finishing third. Neil had to withdraw from the England non-League squad the following week... a sad end, then, to a truly memorable afternoon in Kent.

